

CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF CONSERVATION:

The National Wildlife Refuge System

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On March 14, 2003, the National Wildlife Refuge System will be 100 years old. Over the next six months leading up to the Celebration, a monthly column will appear on these pages with facts and figures about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System. Following the five-part series, a quiz will be published about the Refuge System whose answers will have been provided in the monthly columns. On March 14, 2003, at the Holiday Inn, Detroit Lakes, we will host a public celebration commemorating 100 years of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Completed quizzes that are brought to the March 14 celebration will be put in a bin and a drawing conducted. The first quiz drawn that has all of the correct answers will receive a very special prize. Watch these pages for each month's article and save them on the refrigerator to assist you come quiz time!

The National Wildlife Refuge System began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt set aside tiny Pelican Island in Florida as a "Federal Bird Reservation"—the first "refuge" established specifically for the protection of wildlife, the brown pelican. A warden was employed to protect the Island and thus, Paul Kroegel, working for \$1 per month, became the first "Refuge Manager" in a system that would grow over the next century to include more than 95 million acres in all 50 United States.

Today, the National Wildlife Refuge System is a diverse collection of 539 Refuges providing for the partial needs of the vast majority of species of birds and mammals found in the United States. Refuges range in size from the ½-acre Mille Lacs National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) (right here in Minnesota), to the nearly 20-million-acre Arctic NWR located in Alaska. Refuges have been established to protect a wide variety of species but most often for migratory birds, especially waterfowl. Minnesota has 16 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which include 11 traditional NWRs and five Wetland Management Districts (WMDs). Locally, units include Tamarac NWR, Hamden Slough NWR, the Detroit Lakes WMD, and Rydell NWR located a short distance to the north in Polk County. Just across the Red River, North Dakota has more units of the Refuge System than does any other state. Sixty-four, or more than one in nine units of the System, are found in the Peace Garden State. Alaska has more acres of National Wildlife Refuges than does any other state. Seventy-seven million, or four of five, acres in the National System are found in the Last Frontier.

Over the next five months, we will continue to discuss the heritage of the National Wildlife Refuge System, provide some interesting trivia, and delve into a more detailed look at the history and management of your local National Wildlife Refuges. In the meantime, Autumn is upon us and your local National Wildlife Refuges and Waterfowl Production Areas provide some of the finest settings around for enjoying the season. Whether you are looking to provide table-fare for Sunday dinner, or just looking to experience the fall colors with a quiet walk in the woods, your local National Wildlife Refuges are worth the look. As always, please familiarize yourself with Refuge regulations to keep your visit as safe and enjoyable as possible.

For more information on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Refuge System Centennial, or the your National Wildlife Refuge System please visit our website at <http://www.fws.gov>.